A DISCOURSE OF THE EXCELLENCY OF Christianity.

I. Thess. v. 21.

Πάντα δοκιμάζετε· τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE READER.

READER,

These Papers having lain by me for some years in scattered Parcels, I was at last perswaded to unite in this small Discourse; the Subject is great and glorious, viz. *To set forth Christianity in all its native Beauty and Lustre, which has been too much sullied by the Atheistically given: for whilst the speculative Infidel soars aloft, and thinks to dispute God out of the World, and laughs at Religion by Pretences and Shews of Reason, (though indeed he declares the greatest and vilest Folly) the Practical Atheist sits beneath in a Crowd of Lusts and Passions, Profits and Interests, and though he believe there is a God and such a thing as Religion,*

yet by reaſon of that firm hold Sin and the Devil have upon his mind, he acts in Repugnancy to his Faith, and frames wrong notions of God and Religion, and if he may ſleep ſecurely in thoſe ſins he moſt delights in, he is well contented and at eaſe. And to reduce both theſe ſorts of Perſons to a ſober and fixed Love of Religion, and to the Proſecution of whatever is virtuous and excellent, that Chriſtianity might not be an idle and fruitleſs Notion, but an inward Principle of Life, daily perfecting the Souls of Men, till it bring them to their higheſt and moſt complete Happineſs, is the Aim and only Deſign of this preſent Diſcourſe.

A

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Chriſtianity.

1. REligion in its uſual and obvious ſenſe is a Devoting ourſelves to the Worſhip and Service of the Deity. For God, when he firſt made Man, wrote this Truth on his heart, That he was a Creature, and beholden to ſomething without him for his Life and Being, and therefore ought to worſhip and adore God as his only Happineſs, and by whoſe ever-preſent Power he is as it were daily created anew, and kept and preſerved in Being. And in-

deed there is no man who ſearches into the Perfections of Human Nature, that can find any Principle or Power in Man of conſerving and maintaining his own Exiſtence; wherefore his Exiſtence being drawn through all the parts of time (which have no Connexion or Dependence one upon another) by ſome other more perfect Eſſence, he muſt neceſſarily acknowledge that to be ſelf-exiſtent and ſufficient, and conſequently adore it as the Author and Conſervator of his preſent and particular Subſiſtence.

2. Hence it is that Religion is not a thing which is merely inſtilled into us by Inſtruction and Education: For let us be never ſo impiouſly diligent in raſing the venerable Name of the Deity out of his Temple, and blotting his Inſcription out of our Souls, 'tis manifeſt to all, that we can never totally rid our Minds of the Apprehenſions and Fears of a ſupreme *Numen*: And that ſome men have ſo far debauched their Minds, and ſtifled the Sentiments of Reaſon, that they can ſwallow down the groſſeſt Impieties, as Sacriledge, Rebellion, Murder, and Adultery without the leaſt Regret; proves no more that Religion is not a Principle of Nature, than it doth of the Non-exiſtence

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of the Sun, that ſome men wilfully live in Darkneſs, and ſhut up themſelves, that they may not ſee his Beams; for 'tis evident, that ſuch Perſons have put themſelves into a preternatural State, and forced their Minds and Reaſons to a Conſtitution far different from the Univerſal Nature or Reaſon of Mankind. Nor can it be eluded by fancying Religion to be a piece of State-Policy invented only to keep People in awe, and for the better cementing Governments together, and ſo derived from one Generation to another by the Cuſtom and Example of their Progenitors. For if there were no ſuch Faculty inherent in us, and contemporary with our very Beings, which had a Natural Propenſity and Inclination to a Religious Veneration and Worſhip, it could not be but that in time Nature would return and caſt off whatever is contrary to it. As a Spring has always a *Conatus* to unbend it ſelf, and if at any time the Impediment be removed, will infallibly reduce itſelf to its proper ſtate; So our Faculties, though they may be long diſtorted and forced out of their due Poſition, yet they have ſtill an Endeavour to free themſelves and caſt off that uneaſie Load which con-

ſtrains and oppreſſes them, and will undoubtedly upon any due occaſion offered return to their firſt and true ſtate. And if there were no ſuch Being as God, the wiſer Ages of the World would ſoon diſcover the Falſhood and Impoſture, and chalk out a fair Way and Method for the Natures of men to recover from that Error and Prejudice they lay under, and by their own genuine Effort and Strength reaſſert themſelves into their ancient Liberty. But beſides this, the Peace and Tranquillity of Kingdoms and States Politick might ſufficiently be conſerved without the invention of Religion, by ſevere Laws and Penalties. For although there were no immaterial Being in the World, yet every Perſon being ſo well ſatisfied with himſelf, and contented with the exerciſe of thoſe Faculties he finds in himſelf, no man would ſeek his own Ruine and Torment; and therefore there would be little or no need of inſtilling into the minds of men ſuch a Notion as Religion.

3. In the firſt Times and Ages of the World, the Law of Nature, which God hath equally implanted in all men (and by which I mean nothing but Reaſon, or that Power in man which teaches him

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to distinguish and put a difference between Good and Evil, Beauty and Deformity, Purity and Impurity) was the only Rule and Guide to direct them, and by the help of this they knew God and served him. For God being in himself an infinite Rectitude and Perfection, delineated himself and copied out his own Nature in all moral Agents so far as they were capable of receiving it. And herein God left not himself without witness, in that all Mankind had Means and Helps sufficient to come to the knowledge of a Deity by an inspection into the Book of Nature, wherein God has displaid himself in plain and legible Characters, so that they were wholly without excuse. For if the Law written in their hearts and discriminating between Good and Evil, together with the obvious Reflections from the Natures and Proprieties of things, had not been enough to demonstrate and point out the Existence of a God, men could not have been accountable, nor rendred obnoxious to Punishment. But although this Law sealed on the Tables of mens Hearts were sufficient to teach them τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, that which might be known of God, if they

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would have given heed to it; yet in proceſs of time it ſo came to paſs, that through the Iniquity and Perverſneſs of mens minds, whereby they gave themſelves wholly up to their own Luſts and Paſſions, this Light of Nature became dull, faint, and obſcure, and men were governed only by the Dictates of their corrupt and lawleſs Wills, and the whole Earth was filled with Violence and Oppreſſion, and the greateſt part of Mankind became ſo brutiſh in their Imaginations, that they made themſelves Gods of Gold and Silver, Wood and Stone, and ſerved the Creature παρὰ τὸν κτίσαντα, *beſide the Creator*, who is God bleſſed for ever.

4. Wherefore when this way proved unſerviceable and ineffectual for Mans Reſtauration, God entred upon a new Diſpenſation, and revealed himſelf more plainly to the Jews, chuſing *Jacob* for his Portion, and *Iſrael for the Lot of his Inheritance*, and communicated to them Laws and Statutes and Judgments, fencing and hedging in the impure Eruptions of their Natures by Judicial Decrees, and beſieging Vice and Iniquity by the actual Promulgation of a Law. But this Religion of the Jews lying altogether in

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the Performance of external Duties, in Types and outward Rites and Ceremonies, was not able to perfect the Nature of Man, and bring him to that happy ſtate he was poſſeſſed of before his Fall, (for as the Apoſtle tells us, *Rom.* xiv. 17. the Kingdom of God conſiſts not in meat and drink, but (which is far more valuable) in true Righteouſneſs and Peace and Joy in the Holy Ghoſt; and Man being a Man by his Soul, and not by his Body, it is plain, both that the Religion whoſe grand Purpoſe and Intent is to inſtruct and perfect the Mind, is much ſuperior to that which concerns the Body, and alſo that there is ſome degree of Perfection that the Nature of Man is capable of, which is not attainable by the obſervation of the Law of *Moſes*) therefore it is neceſſary that there be ſome other way found out to recover all Mankind from that ſad and calamitous condition of Vice and Sin they now lie under. For we muſt know that the Soul of Man conſiſts of a perceptive and plaſtick Part, which is the ſame with St. *Paul's* ὁ ἔσω and ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος, *the inner and outward man*, and the Judaical Oeconomy being wholly fitted for the gratification of the Plaſtical or Animal Life, it is impoſſible it

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ſhould refine and purifie that more ſpiritual part of Man, or in the Scripture-Phraſe τελειῶσαι τὸ λατρεύοντα, *make him perfect that did the ſervice.*

5. Wherefore when the fulneſs of time came, and mens minds were in ſome meaſure prepared for the reception of ſo heavenly a Doctrin, Almighty God reſolved to put in execution his laſt and moſt perfect Determination, which was to ſend down his beloved Son into the World, who ſhould by a plain and familiar way teach and inſtruct Mankind, and recover the lapſed World to a ſtate of Righteouſneſs and Truth. Now then, God walks no more at a Diſtance, nor hides himſelf any longer under the obſcurity of Types and Shadows, but hath diſpelled the Clouds and Adumbrations of the legal Services, by the full and bright approach of the Sun of Righteouſneſs, who hath pitched his Tabernacle amongſt us, and teaches us his Will by a way of condeſcending Wiſdom, ſuiting and proportioning himſelf to the moſt ſhallow Capacities. This is that which the Apoſtle 1 *Cor.* i. 21. calls the *Fooliſhneſs of Preaching*, wherein God hath ſtooped down to us, clothing himſelf in the frailties of human Nature, and adapting

adapting the reſults of his Will to our narrow and weak Apprehenſions. And this is that Oeconomy which in *Dan.* ix. 24. is called an *everlaſting Righteouſneſs*, which the Meſſias ſhould bring into the world: For when the πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως, thoſe various Schemes and exteriour Diſpenſations of Religion wax old, paſs away, and vaniſh, this ſhall remain for ever, and never be aboliſhed, as being nothing elſe but the eſſential Preſcriptions of Holineſs, thoſe eternal Rules of Righteouſneſs and Goodneſs that are founded in the very Nature and Being of God.

6. The Goſpel then being of ſo great Conſequence and ineſtimable Benefit to Mankind, it will be neceſſary for every man to know and enquire into the Reaſons of his Belief, upon what Grounds he gives credit to the Chriſtian Religion, that his Faith being built upon a ſolid and ſure Foundation, he may not be aſhamed of his Profeſſion, but according to the holy Apoſtles Advice, ready at all times and upon every occaſion to give an Anſwer to every man that asketh him a Reaſon of the Hope that is in him, 1 *Pet.* iii. 15.

Now

Now the Excellency of the Chriſtian Religion appears,

I. That it is intelligible.

II. That it is true.

III. That it contains nothing light and trivial, but grave and ſober Truths, delivered in that decorous and becoming Majeſty, as well ſuited with that Bleſſed Spirit which inſpired the Prophets and Apoſtles.

IV. That it is every way fitted and accommodated for an effectual Recovery of lapſed and degenerated Mankind.

CHAP. I.

THat the Goſpel is intelligible, cannot but appear to every one that is acquainted with it; for though there may be ſome things wrapped in Clouds and Difficulties, yet they are ſuch as do not ſo nearly relate to Practice, but are of a more ſpeculative Conſideration: But as for the whole Duty of Man in order to Holineſs, and a good and pious Life, it is laid down in ſuch eaſie and plain terms, that no man can have any reaſonable excuſe for himſelf, if he do

do not know and practiſe the Will of God. For the Divine Wiſdom foreſeeing that the greater number of Believers throughout the World would not be men of deep Reaſon, but rather of great Love and Faith, and ſuch as would cordially adhere to their Saviour againſt all Oppoſitions, though they could not ſyllogiſtically maintain the Reaſonableneſs of every part of the Doctrin they profeſſed; God, I ſay, foreſeeing this, hath ſuited the Goſpel to the meaneſt Capacity, and there needs no great Skill to be a good Chriſtian, but rather an hearty and ſincere applying ourſelves to the Practice of what is ſo fully diſcovered to us. The Goodneſs of Almighty God is ſuch, that he conſiders the ſeveral States and Conditions of men in the World, and makes allowance for thoſe whom his Providence hath ſo placed, as that they are not in a capacity of attaining to any great meaſures of Knowledge, and accepts of the conſtant and ſincere Inclination and Bent of their Wills in practiſing what they know, and they ſhall never be called to an account for what they had no opportunity of gaining. And although he that knows much and apprehends

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the Reaſons of things, and makes this Knowledge inſtrumental to the purifying and purging his Soul from Vice, be far more excellent than he whom Nature has made of a ſlower Apprehenſion, yet this man is in no wiſe contemptible, but dear and acceptable in the ſight of God, who never fails to reward honeſt Simplicity and Innocency, and to recompenſe every degree of hearty Love with a ſuitable proportion of Glory.

But that we may ſee before our eyes the Plainneſs and Perſpicuity of the Goſpel in all matters that concern the Salvation and future Happineſs of a Chriſtian, we may take a brief Abſtract or Sum of our Duty, which is this; 'To 'love the Lord our God with all our 'hearts, and to have a firm and radica-'ted Faith in his Goodneſs declared to 'the World by his only begotten Son 'Jeſus Chriſt; an univerſal Abſtinence 'from all Wrong and Injuſtice; a hearty 'Love and Good-will to all men what-'ever; to hold faſt that which is Good, 'and to abſtain from all appearance of 'Evil; to be of a compaſſionate and for-'giving Spirit, and if we have received 'an Injury, not to recompenſe it again 'in any kind; to abſtract and withdraw

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'our hearts and minds from earthly 'Goods, and make Treaſures for our-'ſelves in Heaven, and to be no more 'ſolicitous for worldly concernments than 'the Lilies of the field or the Fowls of 'the air, but that having food and rai-'ment therewith to be content; to keep 'ourſelves pure and undefiled, not only 'from outward and groſſer, but inward 'and more refined Pollutions; to be 'ready to do good and diſtribute to the 'Neceſſities of our Brethren; to live 'peaceably, if it be poſſible, with all 'men; In a word, whatever things are 'true, whatever things are honeſt, juſt, 'lovely, and of good report; if there 'be any virtue, if there be any praiſe, to 'think on ſuch things. What can be plain-er and eaſier than this? Nor is the Simpli-city of the Goſpel any derogation from it, though that impious Epicurean *Celſus* deride it upon that account, extolling the Writings of *Plato* above the Scriptures: For, as *Origen* acutely enough replies, the Deſign of God in the Goſpel being to make men good and virtuous, it was neceſſary the Precepts tending to that end ſhould be delivered plainly and per-ſpicuouſly, ſuitable to the Capacities of the illiterate Vulgar, who are better

Lib. 7. contra Celſum.

allured and won by a common and usual form of Speech, than by the artificial Deckings and gay Schemes of Rhetorick: Οὐδὲ πάλιν ὑπὸ τοῦ κάλλους τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φράσεως λεγόμενον τὸ αὐτὸ, πάντως κρεῖττον εἶναι νομιστέον τοῦ εὐτελέστερον ἀπαγγελλομένου καὶ ἁπλουστέραις λέξεσι παρὰ Ἰουδαίοις ἢ Χριστιανοῖς. And therefore Christ and his Apostles did much more advance that which was their chief aim, the Life and Nature of God in the World by that (as *Celsus* calls it) rude and rustical manner of speaking, than all the elegant Writings of *Plato*, which if they ever were advantageous for the rectifying and amending the Lives of men, it was only to such whose Intellectual Faculties were raised and elevated above the Plebeian Strain. Therefore did the Holy Jesus on purpose make choice of ignorant and illiterate Persons, that it might appear that the things which they spake were not in the *words which mans wisdom teacheth*, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, and that *by the foolish things of the world God might confound the wise, and by the weak destroy the things that are mighty.*

1 Cor. 2. 13. & 1. 27.

Object. But you will say, *To what purpose is that Intricacy and Perplexity which is found in many Places of Holy Scripture,*

Scripture, and wherefore are many of the chiefeſt of its Doctrines involved in ſuch Darkneſs and Obſcurity?

Anſw. 1. It was in ſome meaſure requiſite that the Scripture ſhould be obſcure to conciliate Reverence, and to beget a greater Eſteem of its Worth and Dignity. For the Goſpel is often called a Myſtery, which ſuppoſes ſomthing venerable and ſecret, and hidden from the eyes of vulgar Perſons: And God as in Nature, he hath hid many pretious things in the Bowels of the Earth, which cannot be obtained without great Labour and Diligence; in like manner hath he veiled many ineſtimable Treaſures in the Chriſtian Myſtery, which are only attainable by the diligent Search and ſincere Endeavours of pious men: For ſhould the Divine Wiſdom have diſplayed at once all the Glories and Beauty of this ſacred and recondite Method of recovering Souls, it would appear contemptible and worthleſs, as being the eaſie purchaſe of every profane and impious Perſon.

2. The Reaſon of the Obſcurity of Chriſtianity lies not ſo much in the Nature of the thing itſelf, as in the incongruity of mens Minds and Underſtandings with ſo high and raiſed an Ob-

ject. The Eye cannot behold the Sun unleſs it have ſome Reſemblance and Similitude of it within itſelf; for like is known by its like, and if mens Minds be not purified and brought into ſome Cognation and Likeneſs with the Truths offered to them, it is impoſſible they ſhould ever have any true and genuine Apprehenſion of them. There is a Learning and Knowing the Truth as it is in Jeſus, in that God-like, meek, and reſigned Spirit, and till mens Tempers be plain'd and ſmooth'd from the ruggedneſs of their Paſſions, and the ſtubborn Aſperities of their Luſts, and won to the embracing of the Truth in the love of it, in that Chriſt-like Nature of Humility and Self-Denial, they may fill their heads with ſapleſs and lean Notions, windy and turgent Fancies, but never nouriſh up their Souls with ſolid and ſubſtantial Knowledge. The true ſenſe of Religion and Chriſtianity ariſes out of a mind devoid of Paſſion, and in which the Life of God has taken deep root and flouriſhes and ſpreads itſelf throughout all the powers of the Soul, giving a tincture, reliſh and ſavour of itſelf to every Thought, Word, and Deed in the whole courſe of a mans Life. And without

out this purified ſenſe, we feed upon nothing but the Husks and Shells of Religion, and fall in love with Shadows inſtead of laſting and durable Subſtances. And this is no more than what the Scripture ſpeaks of itſelf. 1 *Cor.* ii. 14. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are fooliſhneſs unto him; neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned.* There is required a ſpiritual Senſe, a Life of Holineſs and Juſtice, of Benignity and Righteouſneſs, to the true diſcrimination of Good and Evil. And further, to the Knowledge and Underſtanding of Divine Myſteries, there is neceſſarily required the Aid and Aſſiſtance of that Almighty and Omnipreſent Spirit, who by his foſtering Incubation brought into Being the goodly frame of Heaven and Earth, and that this Holy Spirit of Truth may begin the Efformation of the new and heavenly Nature (a conſiderable part of which is Divine and Spiritual Wiſdom) there muſt be ſome previous Preparations, and men muſt be morally good and virtuous, or elſe they will be perfectly incapable of the illapſe of his Celeſtial Influence. And therefore it is no marvel, if to brutiſh and immoral

Perſons the Myſtery of Godlineſs be hid and obſcure.

3. That there might be ſomthing ſtill reſerved for the gratification of all degrees of Chriſtians in all Ages of the World. There are both weak and ſtrong Chriſtians; ſome that are Babes in Chriſt, and are fed with Milk, others that are of full Age, and have a diſcriminating ſenſe of Good and Evil. For the one there was ὁ τῆς ἀρχῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγος, a rudimental way of inſtruction, whereby men were led, as it were, by the hand through the Principles of Religion, as the Author to the Hebrews intimates, *Heb.* vi. where the firſt thing required of them that embraced Chriſtianity, was Repentance from dead works, and Faith towards God, and upon this followed Baptiſm, then διδαχὴ which I take to be Catechizing, and after that Confirmation by the Biſhop; agreeable to this Apoſtolical Cuſtom is the Practice of the Church of *England*, who after Baptiſm appoints Children to be inſtructed in the Church-Catechiſm, and then brought to the Biſhop to receive Confirmation: For others whoſe intellectual Capacities were fit for the reception of higher Myſteries, there was στερεὰ τροφὴ, a full

full and rational Explication of the ſeveral *Dogmata* of Chriſtianity; and of theſe St. *Paul* is to be underſtood when he ſays, *We ſpeak wiſdom among them that are perfect*, even the wiſdom of God in the Myſtery of the Goſpel. And St. *John* diſtinguiſhes the ſeveral Ages and Growths of Chriſtians; *I write unto you little Children, becauſe your Sins are forgiven you for his names ſake: I write unto you young men, becauſe ye have overcome the wicked one: I write unto you fathers, becauſe ye have known him that is from the beginning.* 1 John 2. 12, &c.

Now that the Stewards of the Myſteries of the Kingdom of Heaven may give every one his meat in due ſeaſon, it is neceſſary there ſhould be a diverſity in the Goſpel, that every proportion and degree in Grace may receive ſomthing which may both ſtrengthen and gratify the knower. A man is not ſatisfied with that which will nouriſh and content an Infant, and and he that is well grown in Piety and Holineſs, leaving the Rudiments and Principles of Chriſtianity aſcends to higher Notions, and is infinitely ſatisfied and raviſhed with the Contemplation of the Works of Nature and Providence, in beholding the Divine Goodneſs and Wiſdom in the Manifeſtation of that Myſtery

which lay hid from Ages and Generations, and whoſe only Deſign being revealed, is the complete Reſtauration and Perfection of Human Nature. And in this is the Saying of the wiſe man verified, *Eccleſ.* 2. 26. *God giveth to a man that is good in his ſight, wiſdom and knowledge and joy.*

CHAP. II.

Of the Truth of Chriſtianity.

THe ſecond Illuſtration of the Excellency of Chriſtian Religion is, That it is true; which will beſt be evidenced by theſe Gradations:

1. It is certain that there was ſuch a Man as Jeſus in the World: And here I would deſire the Enemies of this Truth, whether Jews or Heathens, to give me liberty to make uſe of the ſame Arguments they themſelves do in proving the Truth of their Hiſtories; For how are they aſſured that there were any ſuch men in the World as *Moſes* and *Ariſtotle?* If they ſay they have it from a conſtant and unqueſtionable Tradition, we can bring the

the same proof for the Christian Religion, the Truth of which hath been delivered successively from one Generation to another for above these sixteen hundred years. If they appeal to the Writings of those who were contemporary with them, the Christians have the same Plea: For the very Enemies of Jesus, such as *Celsus* the Epicurean, and *Julian* the Apostate never questioned his Existence and Being upon Earth. The words of *Celsus* we have in the second Book of *Origen*, Ἐνομίσατε αὐτὸν εἶναι υἱὸν Θεοῦ, ἐπεὶ χωλοὺς καὶ τυφλοὺς ἐθεράπευσε. And *Julian* confesses as much, as we find by *Cyril* in his sixth Book, Εἰ μήτις οἴεται τοὺς κυλλοὺς καὶ τυφλοὺς ἰάσασθαι, καὶ δαιμονῶντας ἐφορκίζειν ἐν Βηθσαϊδᾷ καὶ ἐν Βηθανίᾳ ταῖς κώμαις, τῶν μεγίστων ἔργων εἶναι. I might here bring in the Testimony of *Tacitus*, *Pliny*, and *Numenius* the Pythagorean who in his third Book περὶ τ' ἀγαθοῦ (as *Origen* tells us) relates a certain piece of the History of Jesus, which he afterwards allegorizes; but I need not be copious in this, the Jews themselves who never thought they could sufficiently detest and hate the Name of the Holy Jesus, yet could not deny but he once lived among them, and therefore call him יולת as *Lucian* in derision τὸν ἀνασκολοπισθέντα, *him that was hanged on a Tree.*

Lib. 4 contra Celsum.

2. It

2. It is likewiſe as unqueſtionable that Jeſus wrought many notable Miracles while he converſed with men; and they are ſuch, as if we look into the Quality and Deſign of them, do evidently prove his Miſſion from Heaven, and therefore that all men ought to believe on him. And this miraculous Power ought to have convinced the Jews by their own Law, for this was the Sign or Token left by *Moſes* to diſcern between the true and falſe Prophet, *Deut.* xviii. 21, 22. *And if thou ſay in thine heart, How ſhall we know the word which the Lord hath not ſpoken? When a Prophet ſpeaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to paſs, i. e.* if he do no Miracles, *that is the thing which the Lord hath not ſpoken:* And conſequently, if there ſhall come one whoſe Doctrine tends to the eſtabliſhing the pure Worſhip of the true God, and delivers nothing but what is for the promotion of Piety and Holineſs, and ſhall confirm this his Doctrine by Miracles, both Jews and Gentiles ought to believe in him. But if any one come and ſeek to draw men from real and ſubſtantial Holineſs and the Worſhip of the true God, and to gain credit to his pernicious Deſign, ſhall work a Miracle, we

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are not to believe him, because God sometimes permits such things to be done to try the Constancy and Stedfastness of men. *Deut.* xiii. 1, 2, 3. To this the Jews object and say, that our blessed Saviour performed his Miracles by magical and diabolical Arts, for so they tell him, that *he cast out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of Devils.* To this impious Cavil we may return (1.) the Answer which our Saviour made them, *Mat.* xii. 25, 26. *Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how shall then his kingdom stand?* For the Doctrin of Christ being so exactly opposite and destructive of the kingdom of Unrighteousness and Darkness (as *Porphyry* himself acknowledged, Ἰησοῦ τιμωμένου, οὐδεμιᾶς τις θεῶν δημοσίας ὠφελείας ἤθετο.) If the Head and Prince of this wicked Polity should abet the Lord Christ so far as to impower him to cast out his associates from their usurped Habitations, it would undoubtedly beget an intestine War, and the Powers of Hell would be at an eternal Variance and Dissension with one another, which at last would be the cause of the ruine of their Kingdom. (2.) This were an invincible Tentation put upon Mankind,

Euseb. Præpar. lib. 5.

kind, for there can be no ſurer manifeſtation of the Preſence and Approbation of the Deity, than when a man is inabled to work Miracles: And it were irreconcileable with the Goodneſs and Wiſdom of Almighty God to ſuffer the moſt innocent and harmleſs Perſons in the world to be fatally and inevitably deluded. (3.) The great *Synedrium* conſiſting of the High-Prieſts, the Elders of the People, and the Scribes or Lawyers as their Aſſiſtants, whoſe Office and Right it was to try the Prophets, are ſaid by the Jews to be skilled in Magick Rites for the better and ſurer Exploration of thoſe who pretended to be true Prophets, but wrought their Wonders by the help of Apoſtate Spirits; which, if it were ſo, is a very pregnant Teſtimony that Jeſus performed his Miracles by the Divine Power and Approbation; for otherwiſe his Fraud would ſoon have been detected by that great Council. (4.) That there are preſtigious and Satanical Miracles, is an Evidence that there are likewiſe True and Divine, as in Nature the being of Worſe argues the exiſtence of Better, Sophiſms and Falſhood the reality of Truth, and the operations of Second Cauſes lead us to the knowledge and being of a Firſt; where-

fore

fore if it be granted that evil and lapſed *Genii* can work Miracles, it is apparent that the firſt and beſt Cauſe of all things may and does produce Effects of a Divine Power and Virtue; and that the Miracles of the bleſſed Jeſus were ſuch, appears partly from the Holineſs and Purity of his Life and Manners, in all parts of them blameleſs and irreprehenſible, and partly from the Deſign and Intention of his Miracles, namely to confirm and give credit to that ſublime and heavenly Doctrin he brought into the World, whoſe End was to correct and reform the Lives of men, and diſſeminate the bleſſed Life and Nature of God upon Earth; which Conſiderations are ſufficient to beget a firm and undoubted Perſwaſion that the immaculate Soul of Jeſus was extraordinarily aſſiſted and acted by a Divine Power and Efficacy which enabled him to perform thoſe ſtupendious Operations that are recorded in the Goſpels.

3. We have reaſon to believe that there was a timely Hiſtory of the Life and Tranſactions of Jeſus compiled. For we can no ways doubt but that the Diſciples of our bleſſed Lord, bearing ſo tender and dear a Love to their Saviour, and being ſo fully convinced and ſatisfied in their

their Minds that he was the promiſed Meſſias, who ſhould regenerate and renew the World, did compoſe and draw up an Abſtract or Compendium of his Life: And if we conſider likewiſe how much it would conduce to the carrying on the Deſign they were ſetting on foot in the World, that all men ſhould believe in the Holy Jeſus, and imitate his immaculate and faultleſs Example, we cannot readily believe that they were ſo ſtupid as to neglect ſuch an effectual Inſtrument for the promoting their purpoſe, or ſo uncharitable as to envy Mankind ſo great a Good.

4. That the Hiſtories of the Goſpel were compiled by thoſe whoſe Names they bear in the forefront. And for this we have no greater Reaſon to doubt, than we have to queſtion whether the Pentateuch or five firſt Books of the Bible were written by *Moſes*, or whether thoſe Writings which bear the Names of *Cicero* and *Virgil* as their Authors, were ever compoſed by them. Suppoſe now we would know who was the Author of ſome very antient Writing; to prove this, one Teſtimony muſt be taken from thoſe who were contemporary with the Author, or at leaſt very little diſtant from him, and from

from the perpetual Conſent of wiſe and learned men; and in this the ſacred Volumes have infinitely the advantage above any other Writing whatever. *Tertullian* affirms that the Archetypal Copies written with the Apoſtles own hands were extant in ſeveral Churches in his time. *Age jam, qui voles curioſitatem melius exercere in negotio ſalutis tuæ, percurre Eccleſias Apoſtolicas, apud quas ipſæ adhuc Cathedræ Apoſtolorum ſuis locis præſident, apud quas ipſæ Authenticæ Literæ eorum recitantur.* And is it any more incredible that the very *Autographa* of the Apoſtles ſhould be ſeen in *Tertullian*'s time, than that *Cicero*'s hand ſhould be ſhown in *Quintilian*'s or *Virgil*'s in *Gellius* his age? But beſide that, we have the concurrent Teſtimony of *Juſtin Martyr*, *Irenæus*, and *Clemens Alexandrinus*, all of which were the very next to the Apoſtolical Age, we never find any Controverſie moved either by Jews or Pagans whether thoſe Writings were theirs whoſe Names they bear. *Julian* in *Cyril* acknowledges that the Epiſtles of *Peter* and *Paul*, the Goſpels of *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* are the very Writings of thoſe Perſons with whoſe Names they are adorned. Add to this further, that amidſt the early Differences

De Præſc. adv. Hæreticos.

and

and Diſſenſions amongſt Chriſtians, we never find any ſober and grave Perſon queſtioning this Truth: Indeed we read of the *Ebionites*, a ſort of Judaizing Chriſtians who rejected the Epiſtles of St. *Paul*, but yet they denied not that he was the Author of them, but refuſed them becauſe they thought St. *Paul* an Undervaluer of and Apoſtate from the Law of *Moſes*. But ſuppoſe the Author of any of the Books of the New Teſtament be to us unknown, as it is of the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, yet ought it not to be of any leſs Credit and Authority with us for either the Doctrin or Hiſtory contained in it, becauſe the Matter and Subſtance of the Book is more to be regarded than the Name of the Author; and therefore becauſe for example we find nothing in the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews* which may rationally invalidate our Belief of the things contained in it, and over and above have ſufficient evidence that it was never repudiated by the Chriſtians who ſucceeded the Apoſtles, we deſervedly receive it as Canonical Scripture.

5. That we have all imaginable Reaſon to ground our Faith upon thoſe Hiſtories of the Goſpel delivered to us. And this appears, 1. Becauſe 'tis not likely thoſe who wrote them ſhould be deceived.

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2. Neither is it probable they would deceive others.

There is no likelihood they ſhould be deceived, becauſe they were either Eye-witneſſes of the things they delivered to Poſterity, or elſe wrote them from the mouths of thoſe who were Spectators of them; and we never find a Miracle recorded which Chriſt did alone, without the Company of two or three of his Diſciples; When he was transfigured, he took with him *Peter*, *James*, and *John*; when he raiſed the Ruler of the Synagogues Daughter, he carried the ſame three with him. *Matthew* was one of them who perpetually accompanied our bleſſed Lord, and ſaw the greateſt part of thoſe things which he wrote. *Mark*, it is thought, was an Aſſociate of St. *Peter*, and wrote his Goſpel from his mouth. And *Luke*, beſide that he was one of thoſe who travelled about with St. *Paul*, who had his Commiſſion and Revelation from Heaven, he alſo in his Dedicatory Preface to his Goſpel, profeſſes himſelf to have had perfect Underſtanding of all things from the very firſt, as they were delivered to him from thoſe who were Eye-witneſſes of them. St. *John* was the beloved Diſciple, and always followed the Lord Chriſt where-

ever he went, and ſetting aſide the Metaphyſical Sermons recorded in his Goſpel, he relates very few miracles or new things, but what are confirmed by the Teſtimony of ſome one of the other three. As for that notable Miracle of raiſing *Lazarus* from the dead after four days burial, omitted by all the reſt, it is capable of this account; St. *John* lived long after all the reſt of the Apoſtles and Evangeliſts, even to the Deſtruction of *Jeruſalem*, and *Lazarus* being then alive when the others wrote their Goſpels, they purpoſely omitted it, leſt the reciting and recording ſo eximious and convictive a Miracle, might exaſperate the Jews againſt him, and bring him to ruine, but being dead, St. *John* might ſafely tranſmit it to Poſterity in his Goſpel.

Again, It is very improbable they would deceive others; For, *Cui bono*, to what end or purpoſe, or what Deſign could they aim at in deceiving the World? Honours and Preferments they could not expect, they being all in the hands of the Pagans or of the Jews their bitter Enemies, who hated the holy Jeſus with an implacable hatred, and for that very reaſon perſecuted all his Adherents; nor could they hope for Riches, when the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity expoſed them to the Loſs of all

all temporal Goods, neither could the Goſpel be preached without the neglect of mundane affairs. But perhaps ſome will ſay, they impoſed upon the World, that they might be the Authors of a new Sect; But (1.) either they believed the Doctrins which they taught to be true, or they did not; if they did not believe them, we cannot eaſily imagine they ſhould ſo far forth put off all Humanity and good Nature, which they ſo ſeriouſly and frequently inculcate in their Writings, as to expoſe ſo many thouſand innocent Perſons to Death upon their Aſſertion of a Falſhood: yet if they could be ſo prodigiouſly cruel to others, would they be ſo prodigal of their own Blood as to throw it away upon an uncertain Deluſion? If they thought them to be true, as it is moſt likely they did, their Writings ſhewing that they were in good earneſt, then 'tis certain that it was not the poor and trifling Glory of being the Authors of a new and unheard of Sect, but the real Good and Advantage of Mankind which animated and encourag'd them to ſuch an Undertaking. (2.) It is not the manner of Cheaters to provoke to ſo many Witneſſes, as we find the Apoſtles did. St. *Paul* aſſerting the Reſurrection of our bleſſed Lord, beſide the Teſtimony of the

twelve Apoſtles, brings in five hundred upon the Stage at once to confirm the ſame Truth, the major part of which were then alive when he wrote that Epiſtle. 1 *Cor.* xv. Add to this that a Lie is ſtrictly forbidden by their Writings, and thoſe that delight in it menaced with eternal Deſtruction. *Eph.* 4. 25. *Col.* 3. 9. *Rev.* 21.8.3. (3.) Suppoſe men could be ſo wicked, yet would the Goodneſs of God ſuffer ſuch a Cheat to be put upon the World? If we look upon the whole frame of the Chriſtian Religion, it is ſuch, that the more good any man is, the more likely to adhere to it, and the moſt harmleſs and innocent Perſons in the world are moſt apt to be charmed and overcome by it: But ſurely to them that believe a juſt and righteous Providence governing the affairs of the World, it is apparent that God would not have ſuffered an Error ſo univerſally to prevail, nor thoſe who moſt of all reſemble his bleſſed Nature in Juſtice, Mercy, and Compaſſion, to be involved in Obſcurity and Ignorance, and eternally to periſh in a Deluſion; ſince he may, and acting according to his Nature muſt, neceſſarily detect it.

Now becauſe the glorious Reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God, diſmant-

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ling the Priſons of Death, and freeing himſelf from the Chains and Fetters of the Grave, is the great Pillar and Foundation of the Chriſtian Doctrin; therefore it will be requiſite to wipe off thoſe Spots the mouth of Envy and Detraction hath caſt upon it. To this end I ſhall examine that Objection of the Jews, who ſeeing the clear and evident Proofs of the Reſurrection of Jeſus, invented this Eluſion of it, *That his Diſciples came by night, and ſtole him away while the watch ſlept.* To which, the many improbable and unlikely Circumſtances it is attended withal will be a ſufficient Anſwer and Reply: As (1.) how unlikely is it that his Diſciples, who juſt before fled every one from him, ſhould now reſume ſuch Courage as to venture to ſteal his Body from a Guard of Souldiers? (2.) It is not likely that all the Watch ſhould be aſleep at one time. (3.) If they were, yet 'tis hard to imagine that his Diſciples ſhould come juſt at that time. (4.) How could they roll away the Stone and take out the Body (which ſurely would have made no ſmall noiſe) and yet none of the Guard hear them? (5.) Suppoſe they had taken away the Body, *Quid ex cadavere emolumenti?* what benefit could they have expected from a dead

Carcase? would the dead and infamous Body of an Impostor be a sufficient Motive to induce them to deny Friends and Relatives, worldly Interests and Profits, yea, Life itself to maintain his Credit by telling the World a fair Story of his Resurrection, if indeed there were no such thing.

This being then sufficiently evidenced, that Christ rose from the dead, it is an undeniable Confirmation that all his other Miracles were true: And indeed it could not suit with the Justice of God to leave his Soul in Hell, or suffer his Flesh to see Corruption: For the Innocence of the Lord Christ was bright as the noon-day, and all his Sufferings being undergone upon our account, and having made a full and perfect atonement for Sin, the righteous Providence of God was engaged to raise him up, and instate him in that blessedness which he merited for himself by his voluntary Humiliation and Condescent. According to what the Apostle affirms of him, *Acts* ii. 24. *Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death,* καθότι ἦν ἀδύνατον, *because it was not possible*, i.e. it was not meet, suitable or agreeable to the Justice of God, *that he should be holden of it.*

We have seen the Objection of the Jew, and

and I ſhall now conclude this Particular by conſidering what the Heathen and Atheiſt hath to ſay againſt the Reſurrection of Jeſus; and he brings his Exception after this manner; *If Jeſus did really riſe from the dead, why did he not then ſhew himſelf alive to all, or at leaſt to the chief Prieſts and Rulers of the Jews who condemned him to be crucified, and not only to his own company, and that not conſtantly to them, but like a Spectrum or Ghoſt appearing and then vaniſhing away?*

But it is no wonder if impure and Atheiſtical men do not apprehend the Divine Diſpenſation of Jeſus in the Fleſh, ſince there is a perpetual Antipathy between their groſs and feculent Souls and the Holy Spirit of heavenly Wiſdom: but to them that are ſincere there is nothing in this inſtance but may admit of a fair Apology: We muſt know then that the Soul of the Holy Jeſus being vitally united to the eternal *Logos*, and never lapſed from the pure and immaculate Regions of Bleſſedneſs with the reſt of Mankind, but ſo qualifying his Glory as to fit himſelf for an Union with a terreſtrial Body, muſt have even in theſe earthly Habitations a very efficacious Principle of Life and Virtue within him, which though ſhut up and

conſtrained by the encumbrances of Fleſh and Blood, yet ſhone through the Veil, and ſometimes broke forth into pure Light and Glory; wherefore through the Plenitude and Perfection of this high and exalted Life, it ſo came to paſs that in the time of his converſe with Mortals before his Death, he was not ſeen alike and after the ſame manner by all, but according to the Meaſure and Model of their frail Capacities: And ſome ſuch thing *Judas*, who betraid him, ſeems to intimate by giving a Sign to the Apprehenders of Jeſus to know him, when yet it was true what Chriſt ſaid, that he *was daily with them teaching in the Temple*. And certainly, we cannot but think ſomthing extraordinary to be in the bleſſed Jeſus, when the Scripture tells us that the children of *Iſrael* were not able to behold the glorious Viſage even of *Moſes* when he deſcended from his converſe with God in the Mount. Although then in the frailties of his Fleſh, when he was a Man of Sorrows, and had not yet ſpoiled Principalities and Powers, nor died for Sin, he ſuffered himſelf to be ſeen of all, yet when he had broken the Powers of Hell, and roſe as a triumphant Conquerour from his Bed of Darkneſs, the Grave; he was not then the Object of

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every mans sight, his Divinity being more refulgent when the Oeconomy he undertook in the Flesh was finished; but to those who were capable of his Presence he appeared and shewed himself alive to confirm and strengthen their Faith, and yet spared their Imbecillity and Imperfection by staying but a little with them at a time. For even his Apostles were not all capable of beholding him at all times, and therefore he selected *Peter*, *James* and *John*, who alone were able to bear that glorious Spectacle of his Transfiguration, and behold *Moses* and *Elias* in their celestial Robes, and hear not only their Discourse, but the voice which came to them from the clouds. And hence we gather that he would not appear to those who insulted over him in his misery, and were the Authors of his ignominious Death, out of compassion towards them, lest they should be struck with Blindness, as the wicked *Sodomites* who sought to abuse those Angelical Personages that were hospitably received into the House of *Lot*: And thus we read that *Saul* in his Journey to *Damascus*, was struck blind by that excellent Glory, which yet became an innocuous and recreating Splendor to St. *Stephen* a little before his Death.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

That Chriſtianity contains nothing light and trivial, but grave and ſober Truths, delivered in that decorous and becoming Majeſty as well ſuited with that Bleſſed Spirit, which inſpired the Prophets and Apoſtles.

THe third Particular to be proved in order to the Declaration of the Excellency of Chriſtianity is, that it treats of no ſmall and trifling things, but ſuch as are of the greateſt importance in the world. For what is more noble and generous than that which concerns the Happineſs and Welfare of the whole Creation? What more ſublime and excellent than that which tends to the unmasking the cloudy and obſcure face of Providence, and diſcovering the unſearchable Wiſdom of God in the harmonious Order and Symmetry of the World? But to deſcend more particularly.

1. The Goſpel teaches us, that the true and genuine Felicity of Mankind is the Participation of the Nature of God. That the Souls of men are in an undue and wrong

wrong eſtate in this World, that is, that their Natures are by ſome means or other corrupted and vitiated and forced from their proper Bent and Inclinations; needs no other confirmation than the great Inquietude and Diſſatisfaction they find in the beſt terreſtrial Joys and Delights, and their diligent and indefatigable Inquiſition after ſome noble and permanent Good, which may be commenſurate with the vaſtneſs of their Capacities and Deſires. And although as men come into the World, their Animal Powers and Faculties (whoſe proper Objects are the Reſults of Senſe and corporeal Motion) are fully awake, and uſurp the Throne of Reaſon and Intellect, yet thoſe Lordly Powers like an oppreſſed Prince ſtill lay claim to the Soveraignty and Dominion, and whenever any due occaſion is offered, give an evident proof of their heavenly Birth and Extraction, and ſtrive to free themſelves from their unjuſt Captivity, and regain their native Liberty and Command. And if by a favourable Aſſiſtance and timely Aid the Minds of men conquer and ſuppreſs the rebellious Paſſions and Deſires of the mortal Body, and become in any meaſure healthy and ſtrong to reliſh their proper Food and Nouriſhment, and amidſt

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all the flattering Appearances and fine Shows preſented to them from this outward World, diſcriminate between real Good and Evil, and ſelect true and ſubſtantial from falſe and adulterate Joys, they behold with Pleaſure and Enraviſhment a perfect Union and Harmony between whatever Truths ſhall duly be propounded to them and their rational Natures. For the Souls of men being in their general Strictures and Lineaments Intellectual, it cannot be but that their higheſt Felicity and trueſt Accompliſhments muſt flow from the exerciſe of their higher and more immaterial Powers, and the more ſpiritualiz'd and refined they are from baſer Alloy, the more tender and apprehenſive are they of whatever is Noble and Excellent, and agreeable to the Purity of their Natures. Albeit therefore our Faculties be depraved and debaſed as we appear upon the Stage of this World, yet there being in us a ſtrong Propenſion to return to our firſt and primitive ſtate, out of which we were forced by the unjuſt Uſurpation of Iniquity and Sin, Truth and Goodneſs, and all thoſe beautiful Forms and Ideas which ſhone in our Souls before their unhappy Lapſe and Revolt from the bleſſed Laws and Government of Gods

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own Life, will upon a congruous Propoſal renew their antient League and Friendſhip, and conſpire the utter Subverſion of all irregular Appetites and Deſires, and reduce the whole Man into a ſtrict Obedience and Obſervance of the Dictates and Preſcriptions of that holy and exalted Principle of Life, which being once fully ſeated and radicated in our Minds and Spirits, is alone able to make us perfectly happy and bleſſed. For the Souls of men are not devoid of innate Knowledge, but are eſſentially ſtored through the gracious Bounty and Liberality of the firſt and bleſſed Author of all things, with the Principles of all manner of Science and Wiſdom whatever, and hence cannot but embrace and receive every thing that hath any Cognation and Affinity with thoſe firſt Inſcriptions on their Natures. Now the great Happineſs, Delight, and Satisfaction of every degree of Life in the World conſiſting in and ariſing from the kindly and agreeable Actings of its chiefeſt and beſt Faculties and Capacities, and the Nature of Man ſo far forth as it is capable of moral Good and Evil, being made up of ſuch Principles as are wholly Intellectual, he will not only eſteem the Effluxes and Emanations of the Rational Life to be the Foun-

Foundations of his Felicity, but ſeek the Amplification and Diffuſion of it, and reduce all exorbitant Motions to its Rules and Determinations. And if we will not impoſe upon ourſelves, nor degrade our Minds below the Folly and Triflingneſs of Children, but act like Men who prefer Things before empty Sounds and Names, the eternal Rules of Juſtice, Righteouſneſs, and Goodneſs, will appear infinitely more eligible than any thing elſe in the World beſide; for let a man be poſſeſt of the moſt glorious and ſplendid Advantages and Satisfactions that poſſibly can grow out of the Earth, and let him extract the Flower and Quinteſſence of Sublunary Delights, and he will find them at the beſt very dilute and flaſhy, and too baſe and diſproportionate Objects of a pure, active and indefatigable Mind. And were it not that men are cheated into an Eſteem and Approbation of them, partly from the Example of others, who daily run the greateſt Hazards and Labours in their Acquiſition and Purchaſe, and partly, from the innate Pravity and Iniquity of their own Spirits, which being preingag'd in an early Contention after the things of Senſe, are more forcibly ſtruck and moved by the Emiſſions and Radiations of the Corporeal World,

World; it were exceeding improbable they ſhould forego ſuch valuable and excellent Pleaſures as thoſe of Virtue and Holineſs, for the ſmall and inconſiderable, though the moſt refined Joys of this Region of Mutability, eſpecially when they are perpetually attended with ſuch inſtant Satieties and afflictive Circumſtances. That bleſſed Author of our Felicity the Lord Chriſt, who both knew the Soveraign Good of our Spirits, and deſigned the Cementing and Reſtauration of the broken and diſtracted World by entring into it, makes it his firſt care and buſineſs to purge and refine our Minds from the Droſs and Pollution of material Concretions, by bringing down the Price of terreſtrial Love, and ſetting a low Eſtimate upon what the World calls Happineſs, Riches and Honours and all the choiceſt Gratifications of the inferior Life, and propounding not only ſuch Precepts as in their own nature tended to the raiſing and elevating the Powers and Faculties of our Souls to their higheſt and moſt enlarg'd Perfection, and which by our Conformity to them ſhould fully ſatisfie all our rational Thirſts and Appetites, but likewiſe revives our languiſhing Reſolutions, and reinſpirits our Minds with new Strength and Vigour by

by his own Example, as the moſt attractive and powerful Means that poſſibly can be offered to an ingenuous Nature. All the time that he converſed upon Earth, he went about doing good, tranſcribing the faireſt and moſt amiable Perfections and Attributes of the moral Eſſence of God for our Imitation, redreſſing and healing the Imperfections of Mankind, and caſting a benign and auſpicious Influence upon the diſtempered World, by propagating and diffuſing the holy Life of God into all capable Receptacles. And that he might ſhew us what a ſmall and mean Valuation he puts upon mundane and temporal Felicities, and how little they contribute to the Advancement of that which is the Flower and Summity of our Souls, he commands great Temperance and Moderation both in the Proſecution and Uſe of them, and declares a high Diſlike againſt all Exorbitancy and Exceſſe, condemning all anxious and ſolicitous Thoughts about theſe momentany Concernments as criminous and faulty. And what he enjoined upon his Diſciples and Followers, he himſelf always obſerv'd and practis'd, never diſquieting his holy Breaſt with doubtful and corroding Cares, nor charging Heaven with Partiality and Unkindneſs, though

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he became ſo poor for our ſakes that he was forced by a Miracle to pay his Tribute-penny to the *Roman* Governour. His blameleſs and immaculate Soul no impure touch of Pleaſure ever defiled, nor unjuſt and unhallowed Action ever ſtained and ſullied its native Brightneſs, but remained to his dying upon the Croſs a ſpotleſs Temple eternally conſecrated to the Divinity reſiding in it. But that which did moſt of all allure and attract the Hearts and Spirits of men, was his exceeding and ſuperlative Charity, which not only burnt bright within its own Orb, but by a ſacred Influence and Communication melted and thaw'd the benum'd and frozen World into a ſoft, pliable, and ſequacious temper, and ſet abroad a Godlike Spirit of univerſal Tenderneſs, Pity, and Compaſſion upon the Earth. And that ſo illuſtrious a Perſon might want nothing to recommend his Life to Mankind as the moſt complete Pattern of the Divine Nature, his Patience exhibited in a noble ſufferance of all thoſe Ignominies and Diſgraces put upon him, made him no leſs conſpicuous than thoſe other radiant Virtues rendred him acceptable to God and Man. And if there be any thing more that is worthy and decorous, and perfective of the Nature of Man,

it was eminently contained in the Lord Christ, whose glorious Mind was too large and great to bring forth any poor and abject Design, but took the whole World into his Care, and folded the Creation within the Arms of dear Compassion. By all this and much more we are taught wherein consists the greatest Excellency, Beauty and Dignity of our Souls; namely, in the Acts of Goodness, Righteousness, and Mercy, in profound Humility, and Self-Denial, in Patience, Longanimity, and uncorrupted Purity of Body and Spirit. For these and such like Heroical Exertions of our Minds bring not only a present Delight and Gratefulness with them, but pervade by a secret and insensible Influence all our Animal Powers, and diffuse a certain Savour and Relish of themselves throughout our inferior Faculties. As it is with Vice and Sin, every pitiful and degenerate Production of which spreads its contagious Nature, and leavens our whole Man with its poysonous and infectious Inspirations: so much more will Truth and Righteousness disseminate a healthful Efflux, and hallow our vital Capacities, as being the most congenerous and agreeable Objects of our intellectual Parts. The Life of God which alone ought to have the Soveraign

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Command over the whole rational Creation, and which will in due time conquer and triumph over the dark and apostate Principality; that Life, I say, of universal Sanctity and Righteousness is an immortal thing like its great Source and Parent, and is always passing through the World, and will not rest any where but in such a fit and congruous Subject, as bears some Analogy and Similitude with itself: And being once seated there (unless it be forcibly driven out by rebellious Lusts, to which it proclaims an irreconcileable War) it will continually dispread its lovely Nature, and enlarge its Kingdom by the total Consumption or Conversion into its own Likeness and Quality, whatever resists and hinders its Progress, and at last, when freed from the sluggish weight of Mortality, like a quick and active Flame carry up the Soul with Joy and Triumph into Heaven, to which it always breaths and aspires. Heaven itself is nothing but the blessed Mansion of Righteousness, a State of pure and undefiled Light, whose happy and glorious Inhabitants are perfectly delivered from the Bondage and Servility of Corruption, and Goodness, and Justice, and all the Moral Excellencies of Divinity enthron'd within their sacred Breasts. And

every good Man does not only preſage, but really poſſeſſes in this Life a part of his future Happineſs, when the Divine Nature throughly informs, poſſeſſes, and actuates the Powers and Faculties of his Mind, and he faithfully attends to, and is guided and governed by its Laws and Suggeſtions. And he whoſe Soul and Spirit, thus becomes an Habitation of Righteouſneſs, is in a ſenſe Deified, and God dwells in him, and he is united to that Omnipreſent Spirit of Love and Purity. For that Divine Nature, the Participation of which is the End and Deſign of the whole Goſpel, is not Power and Wiſdom, but ſomething more precious and ſoveraign: for if a man had all Power, that he could remove Mountains, and with his breath ſtop the conſtant Gyres and Circulations of the Earth; and if he had all Wiſdom and Knowledge, to underſtand the abſtruſeſt Theory in Nature and Providence, and could perſwade with the Rhetorick and Oratory of an Angel; yet if he had not Charity, the Bond of Perfection which not only conſolidates and holds together the great Body Politick of Heaven and Earth, but is the Root and Center in which all the lines of Beauty and Excellence in Human Souls unite and meet; he would have

have no more of the true Life and Spirit of Chriſtianity in him, than a tinkling and ſounding Piece of Braſs. Love is the Joy of Men and Angels, the Glory of Heaven, and the firſt pregnant Spring and Source from whence iſſued all the numerous Productions of the Spiritual and Corporeal Life. For God is Love, and Love is that (to ſpeak with Reverence) makes the Divinity a Uniform Being, all other Modes and Attributes being too fluctuating, arbitrary, and unſetled to be the Baſis and Foundation of that ever-to-be-adored Author of all things. And as Goodneſs is the moſt pretious thing in the Deity, and for that reaſon alone obtains the firſt place in acting, ſo is it that which conſummates and completes all moral Agents that derive from him; Power and Wiſdom and all other Modes being nothing but the ſeveral Explications and Diffuſions of abſolute Goodneſs. But that we may not miſtake ourſelves, the Philoſopher tells us of a πάνδημος Ἀφροδίτη, a Harlotry as well as a Heavenly *Venus*, whereby the Soul is enamour'd with theſe fading Beauties, and enſnared by the powerful Ineſcations of Senſe and Corporeity, and this weakens and deſtroys the Soul; but 'tis the celeſtial *Venus* that is the beautiful and perfective

Object of Human Minds, and by its Union with it changes and transforms the Soul into its glorious Image. And what we have hitherto ſaid, is no more than what the natural Sentiments of our own Souls bear witneſs to, and all the moral part of Ethnick Philoſophy atteſts, which was wholly employed in laying down Rules and Precepts for the regulating mens Lives, and putting a ſtop to the bold Intruſion of Vice; and this was univerſally acknowledged the only way to acquire a Cognation and Affinity with God: And what was judged laudable and decorous then, and approved as moſt excellent, is made much more ſo by the Chriſtian Oeconomy, which ſets the Attainments of a rational Soul at a higher pitch, than the ſecular Wiſdom and Philoſophy of the Gentiles could arrive to. For what more ennobles and inſpirits the Mind of Man with true Glory and Magnanimity, than the captivating his irrational Deſires, and ſuppreſſing all inordinate Luſts and Appetites, and the introducing a Spirit of Love, Meekneſs, Temperance, and Sobriety? What more Divine and Godlike than Charity? to bind up an aking head, and dry up watry eyes, and relieve him who was fighting with the Preſſures of Want

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and Poverty? What greater Pleaſure can we reaſonably imagine, than that which reſults from an Act of Goodneſs and Bounty, whether it reſpect the Souls or Bodies of our fellow-Creatures; in extricating him who was involved in a Labyrinth of Miſery, and bringing the cheerful Day to him who ſate in a Night of Ignorance and Error? Which things, if duly conſidered, as they are very agreeable and proportionate to our higher and rational Soul, ſo they depretiate the groſſer Satisfactions of our viler parts, and make good this firſt Propoſition, *That the true Felicity of Human Souls, reſults from their Participation of the Divine Nature.*

2. The Goſpel ſhews us the true way to obtain this complete Perfection of our Spirits, that it is by an univerſal Purification of our Minds from all Pollution whatever, and an entire Reſignation of ourſelves to the Conduct of the Divine Life and Light. But it will be ſaid that Philoſophy teaches as much as this, and the *Pythagoreans*, *Platoniſts*, and *Stoicks* aſſerted the higheſt Perfection of the Soul to conſiſt in her Union with God, which is obtained by a perfect Extirpation of all irregular Motions, and an abſtraction of

the Soul from her Love and Sympathy with the Body, and transforming her wholly into Intellect; For the Passions and sensual Affections being once subdued, and the Rational Life excited, the Soul becomes presently like unto God, as *Porphyry* speaks, Συνεσταλμένων γὰρ τῶν παθῶν, καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν, καὶ ὀργῶν μεμαρασμένων, τοῦ δὲ λογισμοῦ τοῦ οἰκείου ἔχοντος ἀρχὴν, εὐθὺς ἡ ὁμοίησις ἕπεται ἡ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον. And *Hierocles* shews us the Scope and End of this Κάθαρσις or Purgation of the Mind, namely, εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστραφῆναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ τοῦ μὲν τῆς γενήσεως καὶ φθορᾶς τόπου ἐξαναδῆναι, πρὸς δὲ τὸ ἠλύσιον πεδίον, καὶ αἰθέρα τὸν ἐλεύθερον μετοικήσασθαι. Wherefore although the Heathens by the Light of Nature proceeded to the eradication of Vice out of their Minds, yet they retained still an arrogative Life, ascribing the Attainments and Perfections of their Souls, and their whole Progress in Virtue to their own solitary Endeavours, and this their Spiritual and subtle Pride tainted and infected the best of their other Performances; So that though they were glorious Lights in their Generations, yet they fell short of the Character of a true Christian, which is an entire Subjection of a Mans self to the Government and Command of the Life of God, being perfectly dead to

Lib. 3. περὶ ἀποχ.

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all Self-ſeeking and Intereſt, and no otherwiſe affected to ourſelves than if we were not: And this heavenly Temper the Divine Providence reſerved for the meek and humble Soul of the Meſſias to bring into the World, who hath reſumed that as the moſt compendious way to Bleſſedneſs, which was rejected by the wiſe men of the World.

3. He that ſhall impartially and without Prejudice peruſe the Evangelical Hiſtories, ſhall find that there is not any thing recorded in them vain and trivial, but ſuch as is of the higheſt moment and importance, and ſome way or other uſeful and advantageous for the Propagation of Chriſtianity in the World: and for thoſe things which ſeem moſt liable to the Exceptions and Cavils of vile and prophane Perſons, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew their Reaſonableneſs, and how becoming and decorous it was to inſert them in the Hiſtories of the Goſpel. It is too well known that there are a ſort of Men in the World, whoſe Minds are ſo deeply tinctured with Sadducean and Atheiſtical Principles, that, being otherwiſe furniſhed with a quaint Volubility of Speech, and ſome Smatterings of Philoſophy in this knowing Age, deem it the higheſt Improvement of their Wit to laugh

laugh and jeer at that profound Wiſdom which is found in Chriſtianity, now accuſing its *Dogmata* of Impoſſibilities and Contradictions, and then ſcoffing at the Hiſtorical Part as Fabulous and Romantick, clearly diſcovering that their grand Drift is to leaven the Minds of men with that pernicious and venomous Doctrin, *That there is nothing but Matter in the World.*

To begin therefore with the Birth of the bleſſed Jeſus and the Circumſtances attending of it, as of the Star which led the Wiſe Men to him, and of their Adoration of him, that theſe things are not indecorous and ridiculous, nor impertinently recorded, but ſutable and agreeable to the Nativity of ſo great a Perſon. That a Virgin ſhould conceive and bring forth a Child, ought to be no ſuch ſtrange thing to the Jew, ſince their Prophets have foretold that it ſhould ſo come to paſs, particularly in *Iſa.* vii. 14. *Behold a Virgin ſhall conceive and bear a Son, and ſhall call his name Immanuel.* And if this were not to be underſtood of a pure and immaculate Virgin, where were that Sign which God by his Prophet uſhers in with ſuch Solemnity; *Ask thee a ſign of the Lord thy God, ask it either in the depth, or in the height*

Chriſt why born of a Virgin.

height above: for nothing is more ordinary in the World than that a young Woman ſhould bring forth a Child: Add to this, that the Jewiſh Rabbins teach, that the Generation and Nativity of the Meſſias ſhall not be after the manner of other Creatures by carnal Copulation, but after an extraordinary manner, and his Father ſhall be unknown till he himſelf reveal him. Nor ought it to be thought a thing impoſſible by the Gentiles, ſince they affirm many of their Heroes to be the Sons of the Gods; and *Plato* is ſaid to be begotten on *Perictione* by *Apollo*, who forbad *Ariſto* to have any familiarity with his Wife, till *Plato* was born. But to them that believe a juſt and righteous Providence governing all the Affairs of the Univerſe, it is obvious to conceive, that all Souls are ſent into the World according to their Demerits in a former Life; and therefore as a deeply lapſed Soul deſcends into an inequal and monſtrous Body, from which Adunation can reſult no other than a brutiſh, cruel, and intemperate Life, and a Pronity to all other Vices ariſing from ſuch an Aſymmetral and inhoſpitable Society; ſo the pure and immaculate Soul of Jeſus, muſt aſſume a terreſtrial Body after an unuſual manner, more pure than the reſt, that it might

might be free from Sin and Pollution as well as fitted to converſe with Men, and that he might in it teach an extraordinary Temperance, Juſtice, and Goodneſs, and all other Virtues by his Life as by his Doctrin. For neither would the Juſtice of God precipitate ſo great a Soul into an unfit and incongruous Habitation, nor its eximious Purity admit of an Union with an inquinated and filthy Body.

Of the Star.

Nor is it any whit incongruous that an unuſual Star ſhould attend the Riſing of the glorious Sun of Righteouſneſs; for though it be commonly ſaid of Comets, Οὐδεὶς κομήτης ὅστις ἐ κακὸν φέρει, that no one appears to the World but portends ſome Miſchief, which Hiſtorians plentifully obſerve, and hence is that of *Claudian*,

Nunquam futilibus excanduit ignibus Æther,
Et nunquam cœlo ſpectatum impune Cometen.

Yet *Origen* in his firſt Book againſt *Celſus* affirms, that *Charemon* the Stoick in his Treatiſe of Comets proves by ſeveral Inſtances out of Hiſtories that Comets ſometimes preſage the Approach of good things*. If then thoſe great and wan-

*The ſame the Celledge of Prieſts affirmed of the Comet that appeared at the *Ludi Veneris Genetricis* inſtituted by *Auguſtus*. *Plin.l.* 2 *c.*25. And *Virg. Ecl.* 4. *Ecce Dionæi proceſſit Cæſaris Aſtrum.*

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dring Globes be looked upon as the Preſignificators of great Changes and Alterations in the World, what wonder is it that the Birth of Jeſus who ſhould work ſo mighty a Mutation upon Earth, and introduce a Religion univerſal and common to all Mankind, ſhould be declared by a new and ſtranger Star? And if it be ſaid, that it is impoſſible for a Star in the Heavenly Regions, to deſign punctually ſo ſmall a place as a particular Houſe upon Earth; I anſwer, that the *Magi* found the Houſe wherein Jeſus was, not only by the diſappearing and vaniſhing of the Star over it, but ἀκριβῶς ἐξετάζοντες περὶ τοῦ παιδίου, by a diligent Search and Inquiſition after the Child, perhaps of the Shepherds who were not far diſtant keeping watch over their Flocks.

It remains now, that we Apologize for the other part of the Hiſtory, *viz.* The coming of the Wiſe Men from the Eaſt to *Jeruſalem*; to which purpoſe it will be requiſite to conſider the Quality of theſe *Magi*, who probably were none of theſe groſſer ſort of Sorcerers that make an expreſs Compact with the Devil, but ſuch as receiving from others certain forms and myſterious Conjurations, uſe them as they were delivered to them, without enquiring further

Of the VViſe Men.

further into their Nature: And perhaps the black Society may oblige themſelves to attend ſuch dark and hidden Myſteries, whether the Tranſactors of them know them to be theirs or not. But whether theſe *Magi* were ſuch, or had a more open and viſible Commerce with evil Spirits, it matters not, ſince this is certain, that the airy Principality can act no further, where a more divine and excellent Power intervenes. Wherefore through the mighty Virtue of the Divinity reſiding in the Soul of Jeſus, and the unexpected deſcent of a glorious Hoſt of Angels to theſe terreſtrial Regions, ſinging an Anthem of Praiſe at the Birth of Jeſus, it came to paſs that the Power of the airy Principality was on a ſudden reſtrained, and an univerſal Chilneſs and Horror ran through the dark Kingdom, ſo that they were unable to attend their own Helliſh Myſteries, which the *Magi* perceiving, their uſual Incantations not ſucceeding, nor the accuſtomed Effects following their ſecret Rites and Ceremonies, they began to think the Cauſe of this unexpected Accident to be extraordinary, and knowing the Prophecy of *Balaam*, that *a ſtar ſhould come out of Jacob, and a ſcepter riſe out of Iſrael*, conjectured that the Man foretold to come with

with the Apparition of a Star, was now born into the World, and believing him to have a tranſcendent Power over the aereal Agents, reſolved to come and worſhip him, preſenting him with the choiceſt Gifts of *Arabia*, Gold and Myrrh and Frankincenſe, as to a King, a Man, and a God. And if any man deſire a further Myſtery, he may take the learned *Grotius* his Obſervation, that by theſe three are denoted thoſe three Evangelical Sacrifices which through Chriſt we offer unto God, *viz.* Works of Charity and Mercy, *Phil.* iv. 18. Incorrupted Purity of Body, *Rom.* xii. 1. and Prayers, *Pſal.* cxli. 2.

We that are Chriſtians are taught in the Goſpel, that Jeſus Chriſt, the Saviour of Mankind, is God as well as Man; and this Truth being of ſo high and great concern, we not only believe, but are ready to give all poſſible Satisfaction to the Jew and Heathen: To the Jew we ſay, that it was long ago declared by their own Prophets, *Iſa.* ix. 6. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a ſon is given, and the government ſhall be upon his ſhoulder; and his Name ſhall be called Wonderful, Counſeller, the mighty God, the everlaſting Father, the Prince of Peace.* This the more antient Rabbins always interpreted of the Meſſias, and 'tis but

Chriſt God and Man.

but a groundleſs Conceit of *R. Solomon*'s to transfer it to *Hezekiah*; for who ſees not that theſe Appellations of the mighty God, and the everlaſting Father, cannot poſſibly agree to *Hezekiah*? Again *Chap.* vii. 14. *Behold a Virgin ſhall conceive and bear a ſon, and ſhall call his name Immanuel*: i. e. God with us, God dwelling and converſing in Human Nature. And by the Heathens this Myſtery was not thought impoſſible, ſince *Julian* believes that *Æſculapius* the Son of *Jupiter* deſcended from Heaven and was incarnate, appearing firſt at *Epidaurum*, then in many other places, that he might cure the Bodies and reſtore the Souls of men to their priſtine Rectitude and Perfection. And is there any greater Difficulty in believing that the *Word*, the bleſſed Son of God, was once incarnate and dwelt among us? But further to make out this great Truth to thoſe that already believe the Hiſtories of the Goſpel to be true: 1. We may take a view of thoſe many Operations Jeſus performed in the Nature he aſſumed, ſome of which were incommunicable and only proper to the Deity, ſuch are, to work a true and real Miracle, to forgive Sins, and to inſtitute true and religious Worſhip. He was hungry, which ſhewed him to be a Man,

man, and yet fed above five thouſand with five loaves and two fiſhes, whereby he manifeſted his Divinity. He thirſted, yet to others he gave rivers of living waters to fertilize their Souls, and quench and allay their Thirſt. He was weary, yet he calls to him all thoſe that are weary and heavy laden, and promiſes Refreſhment: though he were dumb and opened not his mouth, yet was he that *word* by which all things were made: He lays down his Life, yet had he Power to take it up again. 2. There is nothing in the Divine Nature to contradict or prejudice this Union, but very much to be drawn from thence for it. For Divine Goodneſs willing univerſally to communicate itſelf in meaſures and degrees, aſſiſted by an eternal Wiſdom, found out this way of Union with Human Nature, as moſt fit for an Univerſal Communication, wherein the Divine Life is perfectly exhibited, and all Perfection is as it were epitomized. 3. There is a mighty Congruity and Sutableneſs in this Myſtery with the Deſign of perfecting and reſtoring lapſed Souls. For the eternal *Logos* bringing out of his Ideal Fecundity into actual Exiſtence the whole Rational Creation, it is highly agreeable with Divine Wiſdom, that by the ſame *Word* all

fallen Beings ſhould be again reſtored; that the firſt and bleſſed Cauſe of their Exiſtence ſhould alſo be the Author of their Recovery and Return to the perfect Law of Gods own Nature. And if beſide we conſider that all the Creatures are but the Effects and Emanations of that mighty and potent *Word*, outwardly produced and brought into actual Life and Being; the Conjunction and Union of the eternal Mind with Human Nature will appear exceeding congruous. 4. No Diſhonour can accrue to the bleſſed Nature of God by ſuch a ſtate in which there is no Evil, Turpitude, or Defilement. The Brightneſs of the Divine Sun is no whit obſcured by the adjunction of the Humanity, but the Humanity is made more glorious and tranſcendent by being exalted into the Fellowſhip of the Divinity. 5. The Obſcurity and Incomprehenſibleneſs of this Myſtery ought not to prejudice our Belief of it, ſince that many things in Nature are in the dark to us, and that faint and glimmering Knowledge which we have of them is only cojnectural, not demonſtrative; we know there is an Union between Soul and Body, but the manner of it is unknown and hid from us, and if we believe no further than we can comprehend, we muſt

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be Scepticks in Religion as well as Philosophy. Yet something we may collect from the Union of Soul and Body, as also of other Natural Compositions, that forasmuch as they are extremely distant and unlike in their Nature and Proprieties, and yet united to the making of one Compositum; therefore the Immensity of the Divinity can be no hindrance from taking Humanity into an Union and Association with it. 6 We cannot doubt, but that God who is immense and omnipresent, may manifest a peculiar Presence in this or the other particular place, as seems best to himself. That infinite Nature which pervades and is extended through the vast Capacities of immense Space, can as easily actuate, inhabit and fill a Human Soul and Body; nor is the Divinity contracted or diminished by being united to a Creature, but being diffused through all places, manifests itself by a more special Inhabitation in the sacred Temple of the Soul of Jesus. We see the Soul of Man dilating itself through our corporeal Fabrick, expressing its Activity and Presence by the exceeding quick Sensibility of every part, and yet hath its peculiar Center and Residence in the Brain: and cannot God, in whom are found all possible Perfections, manifest his peculiar and Di-

vine Preſence to the ever faithful and obedient Soul of the Meſſias?

Hitherto I have declared the great Excellency and Becomingneſs of the Truths of the Goſpel, and ſhall conclude this general Head with the Recitation of two or three Objections more, made by the Jews againſt our Saviour, and recorded in the Hiſtories of the Goſpel.

Object. 1. The firſt we find in *John* vii. 48. *Have any of the Rulers, or of the Phariſees believed on him? But this People who knoweth not the Law are curſed.*

Anſw. 1. To this I return, that inaſmuch as the great Synagogue and Rulers of the Jews rejected Jeſus, and would not acknowledge him to be the expected Meſſias, the more reaſon had others to believe in him: for their own Prophets long ago predicted the Rejection of the Meſſias by the Jewiſh Nation, who ſhould be ſo obſtinately blind, that they ſhould not know him when he came into the world; as we read in *Pſal.* cxviii. 22. *The ſtone which the builders refuſed is become the head ſtone of the corner:* ſo likewiſe in *Iſa.* vi. 10. *Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes; leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their heart, and convert*

convert and be healed. To which purpoſe is that Saying of *R. Judas* in the Talmud, *That when the Son of David ſhall come, there ſhall be few wiſe men in Iſrael, and the wiſdom of the Scribes ſhall ſtink, and the Schools of the Prophets ſhall become Brothel-houſes.*

2. The holy Jeſus wanted not Diſciples even among the wiſe men of the Jews; ſuch was *Simeon* the Juſt, the Scholar of *Hillel*, who was filled with the Holy Ghoſt, and after whoſe Death, that Divine Spirit which inſpired the great Synagogue, departed from them. *John* the Baptiſt who not only acknowledged Chriſt himſelf, but ſent his Diſciples to him, as to that Lamb of God, who came to take away the ſins of the world: and *Gamaliel* is ſaid to have followed the Apoſtles, and to have been *Simeon*'s Scholar: And *St. Paul* who was a man of great Repute and Eſteem with the Jews, and ſate at the feet of *Gamaliel*, yet was afterward an Apoſtle of the holy Jeſus: and *Joſephus* further informs us, that the more ſober and ſerious Jews, who were Lovers of the Truth, were ſuch as followed Jeſus, and thoſe that were ſtudious and zealous for the Law, ſharply rebuked *Ananus* the High Prieſt for commanding the Diſciples of Jeſus to be ſtoned.

Object. 2. *Acts* i. 6. *Lord, wilt thou at this time reſtore again the Kingdom to Iſrael?* It was a current Opinion among the Jews in our Saviours time, that the Meſſias ſhould be a Temporal Monarch, and redeem them from the yoke of the *Romans*; as appears from this Queſtion of the Diſciples, who doubtleſs ſpake the general ſenſe of the Jews; but they finding nothing in the Attempts and Actions of Jeſus tending that way, hence they could not believe him to be the promiſed Meſſias.

Anſw. Chriſt came into the World, ſuch as he was foretold to be, that is, humble and meek, not with the Splendor and Glory of an earthly Prince, but poor and deſpicable, a man of ſorrows, and without form and comlineſs; as it is predicted by *Zechariah* the Prophet, *Zech.* ix. 9. and *Iſa.* liii. The End and Deſign of his coming was to appeaſe the Anger of God, by devoting himſelf for the Sins of men; to deſtroy the Kingdom of the Devil, and to make one body of Jews and Gentiles, of which he himſelf ſhould be the Head. And 'tis no way fit and agreeable for ſuch an Undertaking to appear in earthly Splendor and Glory, filling the World with Blood and Slaughter like another *Alexander* or *Caſar*,

Cæſar, by the Puiſſance of mighty Armies. Wherefore the holy Jeſus being to diſſeminate and promote the bleſſed Life of God upon Earth, ſhewed his Divinity more refulgent by Vileneſs and Contempt, his Power by Weakneſs and Infirmity, his Glory by the Scorns of men, and his Almighty Life and Virtue by Death and the Grave. And if he had otherwiſe deſcended from the celeſtial Manſions, than the Scriptures relate, Man had entituled himſelf to part of the Glory of his Undertaking, and the more ſplendid the Divine Life had appeared to outward view, with the fainter Luſtre had it ſhone in itſelf. Beſides that that Doctrin which Chriſt was to bring into the World, and render acceptable to men by his own Example, was quite contrary to the Gratifications of the Animal Life, and too vile and baſe to be eſſential to the Perfection of Human Nature.

Object. 3. *Mat.* xxvii. 40. *If thou be the Son of God, come down from the Croſs.*

Anſw. He that came into the World clothed with human Fleſh, and in the ſeveral Actions of his Life manifeſted himſelf to be a true Man, would now in this laſt Act keep a Decorum; that as he was born into the world like other men, partaking really of Fleſh and Blood, and all

the Frailties and Infirmities of Mankind, Sin only excepted; ſo he would die like other men, and ſuffer a real Separation of his Soul from his Body, that we might be conformable to him in his Death, and die unto Sin, crucifying all our inordinate Luſts and Affections, and deſcending into the Grave with him by a profound Humility and Mortification; which is a ſufficient Anſwer to this inſulting Cavil of the Jews, that if Jeſus were the Son of God, he muſt needs demonſtrate it by a miraculous Deſcent from the Croſs.

CHAP. IV.

That Chriſtianity is every way fitted and accommodated for an effectual Recovery of lapſed and degenerated Mankind.

TO this purpoſe we muſt conſider Man as a rational Being, endued with Liberty of Will, and a Lord of his own Actions, and conſequently muſt be treated according to thoſe Faculties and Qualifications beſtowed upon him by the gracious Bounty of his Creator. And this being the Nature of Man, he is not to be dealt withal like a Stock or Stone, that is wholly

wholly inert and ſluggiſh; nor like a Beaſt that is acted and led only by the impulſe of Senſe; but as indued with Reaſon and Intellect, and capable of diſcriminating between real Good and Evil; and this Principle in Man cannot be forced without the Deſtruction of his Nature, but is allured and drawn by moral Arguments. Wherefore the Deſign of God in the Goſpel being to wind men off from Sin to a ſerious purſuit of Virtue and Goodneſs, he makes uſe of ſuch Arguments as are moſt powerful and efficacious for that end, and moſt ſutable to the Nature of Man: As

1. What can more deter men from Wickedneſs and Vice, than the ſober preſſing upon them the Conſideration of a future day of Judgment, wherein the juſt Judge of Heaven and Earth will impartially look into their Lives, and diſpoſe of them according to the moral Frame and Diſpoſition of their Spirits? To them who by patient continuance in well doing, ſeek for Glory, Honour and Immortality, eternal Life: But to them who do not obey the Goſpel, he will recompenſe Tribulation and Wrath. He that is convinc'd that the Scriptures are the Word of God, muſt likewiſe believe, that though

though God be patient and long-ſuffering, not willing that any ſhould periſh; yet he is likewiſe juſt, and hates all Sin whatever; and to convince all unbelieving and Atheiſtical Perſons of his Diſpleaſure againſt Wickedneſs and Vice, he has appointed a Day wherein he will judge the World; a Day wherein Jeſus Chriſt the bleſſed Son of God ſhall viſibly deſcend from Heaven, accompanied with innumerable Legions of mighty Angels, before whoſe Throne all wicked Men and Devils ſhall ſtand with Paleneſs and Horror, expecting the Pronuntiation of that dreadful Sentence, *Go ye curſed into everlaſting fire*; which final Doom and Sentence ſhall preſently be executed upon them; for through the ſtupendious Operation of the Son of God, the infernal Treaſures of Fire ſhall be opened, and an univerſal Deluge of Flame ſhall ſpread itſelf over the Face of the aged Earth, which ſhall be cleft and riven by terrible Eruptions of ſulphureous Matter, breaking forth with horrible Rage and Fury from the lower Regions, and this together with Showers of Fire raining down from thick and pitchy Clouds, ſhall wrap Univerſal Nature in a ſheet of Flame, and complete an external Hell, where the Worm dieth not, and the Fire

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is not quenched. Tell me then, O Man, thou that thinkeſt Righteouſneſs but an idle Name, on whoſe hard and ſtubborn ſoul a Diſcourſe of another Life can make no Impreſſion; where will be the Objects of thy Love and Joy, when the Heavens ſhall be diſſolved, the Elements melt with fervent Heat, and the Earth with all the works therein be burnt up? What ſhall ſupport and bear up thy dying Hopes, when all ſenſible things ſhall periſh in this dreadful Conflagration? Thinkeſt thou that the Holes of the Rocks, or the ſecret Caverns of the Mountains can hide thee from his Eye which pierceth through Obſcurity; who is every where preſent by his mighty Power, and to whom the Night is as bright as Noon-day? Or will that juſt Judge, who ſits upon the Life and Death of all the Sons of *Adam*, be bribed with thy Gold and Silver, when the whole World is his, and the Fulneſs thereof? Surely nothing but Righteouſneſs will then deliver from Death, nothing but Innocence and Purity, white as the Beams of Light, can ſave the Souls of men from eternal Deſtruction: Wickedneſs and Sin like a Talent of Lead ſhall ſink down thoſe Souls that have delighted in it, into that ſulphureous Lake where a moſt acute

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and ſearching Pain ſhall ſtick cloſe to them, and unſpeakable Torments weary their reſtleſs Ghoſts for ever. A ſad and pitiable Calamity! but as juſt as great; for the bleſſed Author of all things does not make Laws to enſnare the Creation, nor does he directly and primarily intend Puniſhment, but has entailed that upon Diſobedience, that men might conſider and beware, and in time provide for their Reception into all that Happineſs God made them for, and which he by threatning Puniſhment, ſo affectionately deſires they ſhould enjoy.

2. That there might be nothing wanting to enforce the foregoing Conſideration, the Scripture manifeſtly reſolves our good or ill Being in the other Life to depend upon our Deportment in this. It is in this life that we lay the trains of our future Happineſs or Miſery, and every moral Action has an Influence either good or bad upon Eternity; and here it is that we have a vital Union and Conjunction either with Hell or Heaven. To be born into this World, is not only a Puniſhment, but a ſtate of Probation to us Mortals, wherein he that acquits himſelf generouſly and nobly, fighting manfully againſt the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, and returns

turns with the Spoils and Trophies of his conquered Enemies to his beloved Lord, ſhall be crowned with an eternal weight of Glory; but he that through faint-heartedneſs and cowardice yields himſelf a willing Captive to his Luſts and Corruptions, ſparing thoſe rebellious Sins and Affections, with whom the Captain of our Salvation has ſworn War for ever, he combines and unites himſelf to a living Hell; and no ſooner is his Soul diſlodg'd from its earthly Fabrick, but it deſcends into thoſe Regions of Bitterneſs and Sorrow, with which it ſo wilfully ſought a Cognation and Affinity in this Life. And he that will but patiently lend an ear to this, cannot ſo obſtinately forſake his own good, nor delay and put off his Repentance by imagining the day of Judgment a great way off, and not likely to overtake him: For no ſooner has Death diſſeized him of his terreſtrial Tenement, but that univerſal *Nemeſis* which pervades the whole World, will fatally convey him to ſuch a Place and Society, as he had prepared and accommodated himſelf for here on Earth. And he that obſtinately rejects the Counſel of God, and ſets at nought all his Reproofs, will find that the Wrath of the Lord can reach him, and he will have

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little or no Poſſibility left to better himſelf in the other World.

3. For the more ingenuous ſort, who are rather attracted and won by the Expreſſions of Kindneſs and Love, than the Fear of external Puniſhment; what can more prevail with them, than to behold the ever-bleſſed Son of God, who lived in the boundleſs Tracts of Truth and Righteouſneſs, forſake thoſe celeſtial Manſions, and come down and take a Body of Fleſh and Blood, and here lead an obſcure and evanid Life, perſecuted and afflicted, never ſeeing good days, but always carrying an heart full of Penſiveneſs and Sorrow, and at laſt die a painful and ignominious Death upon the Croſs; and all this to recover and free the race of Mankind from the Tyranny and Slavery of Sin? What can this but beget a ſuitable return of Love in every ingenuous Soul? What kind heart is there that this Spectacle will not fill with Tears of Love and Joy, and with the moſt endearing Expreſſions devote itſelf to a faithful Obedience of ſo compaſſionate a Saviour?

4. The Promiſes of the Goſpel are moſt ſuitable means for the reinſtating men in the Poſſeſſion of Gods own Life, that poſſibly can be offered to the World.

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For he that conſiders how deeply Vice and Iniquity are radicated in our very Natures; and what great Diligence and Care is required to extirpate even a ſingle Habit, which of a long time hath gotten an entire and full poſſeſſion of our minds; and withal reflects on the crazy and ſickly ſtate of our moſt generous and manly Faculties, how bedwarfed and unable they are to reſiſt, through a continued imbibition of a ſweet Poyſon from Senſe; cannot but conclude the Evangelical Oeconomy would be very lame and imperfect, were it not inſtructed and furniſh'd with Arguments ſufficient to countermand and outbalance the importunate Solicitations of the degenerate Principles of Unrighteouſneſs and Sin. And indeed were not a Crown of Glory the great Begetter of our holy Faith, were not Virtue countenanced with an appendent Felicity, the Face of the World would now appear as ſqualid and deformed, as in its firſt and greateſt Brutiſhneſs and Barbarity: For who would ſeek the Renovation of decayed Righteouſneſs, or who would entertain afflicted and oppreſſed Holineſs, if its Reward did not fully anſwer and compenſate whatever Troubles, Difficulties, and Moleſtations do attend it? Who would buy

buy Religion with the Expence of all his temporal Intereſts, nay of his Life itſelf, if he were not aſſured the Happineſs laid up for holy and incorrupt Souls, did infinitely tranſcend and exceed the choiceſt Pleaſures and Gratifications that are to be met withal in this Region of Mutability? And that ſuch a Courſe and Order of things ſhould be taken, is not only a merciful Proviſion of the good and wiſe Creator of all things towards us Sons of Senſe, but gives us a full Evidence and Aſſurance that his Intentions for the Recovery of the World are real and ſincere, and renders unſuſpected the grand Diſpenſation of Chriſtianity. For had the Goſpel propounded only intellectual Notions, and ſolicited our choice by things moſt remote from Senſe, while we were ſo fatally entangled and oppreſt with the Incumbrances of dull Mortality; ſuch a Deſign would rather confound and amaze the Faculties and Capacities of men, than prove any whit ſerviceable for the regaining their antient Liberty and Command; like a potent and vigorous Light ſet before weak and diſtempered Eyes, which rather blinds than affords them a true and faithful diſcrimination of Objects. Wherefore Divine Wiſdom hath treated the

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Sons of men after a ſenſible manner, and engaged them by Arguments that more forcibly ſtrike their Fancies and Imaginations, and have a greater Influence for the promoting the indiſpenſable Duties of Sanctity and Truth, than any terreſtrial Pleaſure can poſſibly be allective to the contrary. 'Tis true, if Religion could conſiſt with Avarice, Vain-Glory, and Ambition, the covetous Miſer who rips up the Bowels of the Earth for Treaſure, and ſpins out his Life in a golden Thread, would become a Proſelyte; and he who ſeeks to ride upon the ſhoulders of the Multitude, and lives upon the Air and Breath of Popular Applauſe, would need no Inducements to turn Chriſtian: But when things go directly contrary, and he that will be a ſincere Diſciple of the Son of God, muſt crucifie his rebellious Luſts, and deſcend into the Grave of Mortification, and caſhier every inordinate Motion and Deſire that hinders or any way obſtructs his approach to ſo ineſtimable a good, as the Poſſeſſion of the bleſſed Life of God; and this not to be done without indefatigable Induſtry and Care, and as it were a Dilaceration of himſelf from himſelf, that is, a forcible Subjection of that grand Principle of our

Apoſtaſie and Deviation from God, which is ſo miſchievouſly powerful, to the Commands and Laws of our ſuperior Life; there is no man can doubt, but that the Promiſes of the Goſpel are infinitely neceſſary, in order to that weighty Deſign eternal Wiſdom ſeeks to carry on by the Promulgation of them to the World.

Which Promiſes we may refer to theſe three general Heads, 1. Pardon of all our Sins upon a true Repentance and ſincere Conformity of our Minds and Spirits to the Will of God. And this was the great End of Chriſts coming into the World, that he might reconcile it unto God, and aſſure guilty Sinners who had made themſelves obnoxious to Divine Wrath and Diſpleaſure, that if they will return to their Loyalty and Obedience, and expreſs an unfeigned Repentance by ſincere Purpoſes and Reſolutions of a new Life, God will forgive their paſt Treſpaſſes, and remember their Iniquities no more. The whole Goſpel, what elſe is it, but a free and gracious Declaration of Pardon and Forgiveneſs to the World? which, as it takes away all direful and jealous Thoughts, which criminal Perſons through a Conſcience of their own Guiltineſs and Sin, and frequent Preſa-

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ges of Divine Vengeance, are apt to retain of God; ſo it gives them a true and faithful Repreſentation of his Nature, that he is no dreadful and hurtful Being encircled with Tempeſts and devouring Flames, no Tyrant whoſe arbitrary Love or Hate are the Rules and Laws of his Government; but an Almighty Goodneſs whoſe pregnant Fecundity gave Life and Being to the whole Creation, and ſtudiouſly endeavours the Conſervation of all things in all that Happineſs their Natures are capable of. This was it to which the holy Jeſus bare witneſs, and publiſhed to the Sons of men by going about doing good, and diffuſing a Spirit of real Righteouſneſs throughout the World: He took it upon his Death that this was true, that God did infinitely deſire the Reconciliation of the World to himſelf, and that not for any Self-Ends or Deſigns (for what can accrue to him who is infinite Life, and eternally poſſeſſed of whatever ſpeaks Perfection?) but for the ſole Good and Welfare of things themſelves, that every Being might obtain that Place and Order in the Univerſe, and enjoy all that Felicity to which it was at firſt intended, and from which nothing but its own wilful Wretch-

edneſs could degrade it. For Gods Juſtice is nothing but his Goodneſs, Power, and Wiſdom imployed for the Maintenance and Conſervation of what is eternally juſt and right; and if this may be done without Extremity and Rigour, his Goodneſs doth as much oblige him to take the gentleſt and mildeſt Courſe, as any man can pretend his Juſtice for exact Puniſhment and Severity. But that all the Attributes of the Deity might be at once ſecured, and fallen Man reſtored to a Capacity of being made happy again, Chriſt appearing in human Nature hath undertaken the Cauſe of Man, and given himſelf a Ranſom for all, the Puniſhment due to us being transferred on him, and through the Sacrifice and Death of Jeſus, God is upon terms of Peace and Friendſhip with the World, and proclaims a free Indulgence to all who will lay down their Hoſtility and Rebellion, and become obedient Subjects to his Kingdom. God takes no advantage againſt any man to deſtroy him, and 'tis a horrid Impiety in us, to ſuſpect him of Treachery and Deceit; and to repreſent God to our minds in ſuch a fearful Garb and Image, as eternally wiſhing the Deſtruction of the greateſt

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part of his Creatures, is no leſs Idolatry, than to fall down and worſhip the Works of our own hands.

2. The powerful Aſſiſtance of Gods Spirit to enable us to perform his Commands. When the great Love the holy Apoſtles bare to the Lord Chriſt, made them ſorrowful for his Departure, they ſuppoſing he would then leave them to the Mercies of a faithleſs and perverſe Generation; he takes Compaſſion on his Charge, and aſſures them that when the time comes that his bodily Preſence ſhould be withdrawn from them, he would not leave them deſtitute and forſaken; but ſend the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth unto them, who ſhould not only perform the Office of an Advocate, in pleading and maintaining the Juſtice of his Cauſe againſt the unrighteous World, but be a Principle of Love and Purity in their hearts, and conduct them through the various Windings and Obliquities of Error and Falſhood into the plain and eaſie Paths of Truth and Righteouſneſs. And for a Confirmation of this Promiſe, he appeals to common Senſe and the Evidence of all Mankind; *If ye who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more ſhall*

your heavenly Father (from whom all Creatures proceed, and upon whom they depend more intimately, than Faculties and Actions upon the Principles from whence they flow) *beſtow his Holy Spirit upon them that ask it of him?* Wherefore that no man might deſpair, and count it an impoſſible thing to atchieve a perfect Victory and Conqueſt over his Luſts and Corruptions; God has promiſed, that the Buſineſs ſhall not be tranſacted by our own ſingle Effort and ſolitary Endeavours; but that we ſhall have the powerful Aid of his bleſſed Spirit, than which nothing can be a more vigorous Encouragement. For what can reſiſt his Almighty Energy and Virtue? or what can be ſo ſtubborn and refractory, that he cannot render ſequacious and obedient, who at firſt brought all things out of nothing? Be our Luſts never ſo mighty and gigantick, and the Powers of Darkneſs never ſo reſolutely armed againſt us, yet the Strength and Aſſiſtance derived to us from Heaven, is able to put to flight all our Enemies, and make us perfectly victorious. The Spirit of God is no dull and ſluggiſh Principle, but a quick and active Life; and into whatever Soul it enters, it is perpetually

tually cleanſing, and purifying, and refining it, till it have wholly extirpated and deſtroyed whatever bears no ſimilitude with itſelf, and rendred the whole Man an immaculate Temple for the Manifeſtation of its own glorious Preſence. Let no man then pretend an invincible Infirmity, or that he is fatally bound and enſlaved to Sin and Vice; for if we would but excite thoſe Powers God has given us, and by ardent Breathings invocate the gracious Auxiliaries of Heaven, there would be Wonders wrought upon our Souls, the Strength of our Corruptions would abate, and our furious Paſſions be reſtrained and reduced into Diſcipline and Order.

3. The laſt general Head is the Promiſe of a future and bleſſed Immortality in Heaven, when this preſent Life is ended. The bleſſed Jeſus, while he lived upon Earth, did not wholly obſcure his Glory in the mantle of Fleſh and Blood, but gave a notable Specimen of that efficacious Life and Power, which as he himſelf was already poſſeſſed of, ſo all thoſe that believe in his Name ſhould hereafter be endued withal, which ſhould melt their Corruptible into Incorruption, and tranſlate them to the quiet and peace-

ful Regions of Immortality; in his Tranſfiguration upon Mount *Tabor*, which was enough to call off the Thoughts and Cares of men from the trifling Concerns of this World, and teach them, that there was a better Portion to be expected for all the Sons of God and Virtue in the pure and undefiled Manſions of Heaven, where dwells nothing but Truth and Goodneſs: But the moſt lively and pregnant Evidence of the future Subſiſtence of our Souls, was his glorious Reſurrection from the dead, whereby as he was declared to be the Son of God with Power; ſo it gives us a full Aſſurance and convictive Demonſtration, even to outward Senſe, that the comfortleſs Chambers of the Grave ſhall not for ever detein us; but that when he who is our Life, ſhall appear and ſummon Earth and Sea to deliver up their dead, and open the ſecret Receptacles of Souls; then ſhall all holy and righteous Perſons appear with him in Glory, and take poſſeſſion of their long expected Joy, and receive the juſt Recompence of all their Pains and Labours; an Inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reſerved by a gracious Providence in the Heavens for them. All Power is com-

committed into the hands of Christ, who hath vanquished Death and Hell, and captivated all the Powers of Darkness, and begotten us to a lively Hope, that when we shall put off our Mortality, and be released from all terrestrial Pressures and Incumbrances, he will cloth us with an heavenly Body like unto his own Body of Light and Glory. But lest we should undo ourselves with fruitless Expectations, and flie to Heaven in our vain Dreams of Salvation, before our sincere Conformity to Gods blessed Will and Commands has rendred us capable of that pure and holy State, fancying we can read our Names written among the Stars, before we have learnt the Precepts of a holy Life, God hath annexed Conditions of Obedience to all his Promises, and resolved that no man shall be crowned, but he that with Courage and Perseverance maintains the War against Sin and Hell. And indeed the Reward that is promised to all virtuous Persons in the Gospel, hath so great Affinity and Agreement with Holiness, the Condition of it, that in the Nature of the thing itself, he cannot be capable of the one, who is not aforehand invested with the other: For what is Heaven, but a state of spotless

Love

Love and Purity, where no Envy nor Malice ſtraitens and contracts the boundleſs and enlarged, no clouds of Paſſion or diſordered Luſt obſcure the Brightneſs of that eternal Day, where the Sun of Righteouſneſs neither riſes nor ſets upon the Horizon of Time, but remains Vertical for ever? And now what Concord can poſſibly be imagined between ſuch tranſcendent Beauty and Glory, and the Deformity and Uglineſs of the Frame and Temper of an unrighteous mans Spirit, where every thing lies croſs and untoward; and his unruly Deſires, like the boiſterous Waves enraged by a ſudden Storm, ſweep the bottom of his polluted Soul, and throw up ſo much Mire and Dirt, that it defaces whatever is comely, and leaves not the leaſt Emblem of Heaven to be diſcerned in it?

This is the grand importance of the Promiſes of the Goſpel, which is enough to demonſtrate the prudent Care and dear Affection of the Son of God to the Children of Men, and a ſufficient Manifeſtation of the great Ingratitude and Unworthineſs of thoſe who do not believe in him, that it is not the Want of Reaſons or convictive Arguments, but their own careleſs and wretchleſs Neglect of Conſideration,

tion, that makes them deaf to ſuch Charms of Love, and ſtupid and unmindful of ſo important Intereſts.

But men ſeldom want Objections againſt that which they have no mind to believe; againſt this therefore 'tis ſaid, *That if the Promiſes of that eternal Reward, Chriſt has made to us in the Goſpel, be ſo framed as to be inevident to men, and leave them place of doubting; it will be no ſuch great Crime in wicked Perſons, not to believe thoſe Promiſes, and ſo not to embrace them.*

To this I ſay, (1.) That the Goſpel leaves no ſuch place of doubting, as to make Infidelity or a Disbelief of it excuſable. For Unbelief can then only be excuſable, when there are really wanting ſuch Arguments, as may beget Faith in a rational and unprejudic'd Perſon: But the Goſpel and the Promiſes thereof being ſufficiently confirmed by ſuch prevalent Reaſons, as are apt to acquire Belief and Credence from an unbias'd Nature, the pretended Inevidence, where there is no juſt Cauſe or Suſpicion of Doubting, cannot at all patronize Infidelity, nor be a reaſonable ground to act contrary to what Belief would otherwiſe incite them. Its true, were the Arguments for the

the Disbelief of the Promises of Life and Salvation equal to, and strong as those that perswade us to the Belief of them, there would be some Colour and Appearance of Reason for rejecting them; but when there can be no such Doubting or Fluctuation of Judgment, as proceeds from an Equilibration of Arguments on both sides, it is impossible that Infidelity should have any rational Apology. For what can be more convictive, than to have some holy and divine Person come into the World, who should by many infallible Miracles, Wonders, and Signs, give an evident Proof that he came from God; and for a full Confirmation of his Doctrin, rise from the dead the third day after the suffering a painful and ignominious Death; and to shew that he was no Spectrum or illusive Phantasm, conversing with his Disciples for the space of forty days, and afterwards ascending in their Presence into the highest Heavens, there to rule and govern his Church till the End of the World; to testifie which his *Apotheosis*, he sends down his holy Spirit upon his Apostles, and enables them to speak with Tongues and do Miracles: which Scheme of Providence doth so palpably evince the Interposition and Efficiency

ency of a Deity, and that all these things hapned by his actual concurrence, that he must on purpose blind his eyes, who will not see it.

2. All the place of doubting, which is left to us in the Belief of the Promises of the Gospel, is no other than what may be in the highest moral Certainty imaginable. It only leaves a Possibility that, notwithstanding all the Arguments brought to confirm it, it may yet be otherwise. Every thing is not capable of a Mathematical Demonstration, but the ways of Probation are different according to the Diversity of Subjects. And certainly, he will be a very imprudent man, that will neglect an important Affair, to the Undertaking of which he hath highly probable Reasons, only because 'tis possible it may be otherwise.

3. It was a great piece of Divine Wisdom, so to order the Gospel that the Promises of Life and Salvation should not be so evident, as those things that are known by Sense or Demonstration; but only so far as might conciliate Faith in a rational Person, that thereby the wicked Tempers and Dispositions of men might the more plainly be discovered. If the Gospel had been so demon-

monſtratively certain, ſo as to exclude all Doubting, *i. e.* Poſſibility to the contrary, all men would have been forced and neceſſarily good, and all that Praiſe which is due to the embracing of Virtue, would have been loſt; but now that men believe, when notwithſtanding there is a Poſſibility to the contrary, the Trial of their Faith will be found unto Praiſe and Honour and Glory at the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt. For what Praiſe is due unto him, that believes not out of Choice, but from the neceſſary and demonſtrative Truth of the Thing itſelf? Let not any man therefore flatter himſelf with hopes, that this will patronize and defend his Infidelity, that it was poſſible the Evangelical Promiſes might be uncertain; but let him conſider, upon what account his Faith induces him to act in the Affairs of the World. Will a human Faith be ſufficient to perſwade the Merchant to commit his Life and Fortunes to the flattering Waves, when he knows not but a mercileſs Pyrat or the next ſucceeding Storm may bereave him of both? Will the Souldier march all day ſcalded with Heat, or pinched with the Northern Cold, and expoſe his Body to a Storm of Bullets and Swords

drunk

drunk with his Companions Blood, and all for the Spoils of an uncertain Conqueſt? Shall this be able to put us upon Action, and ſhall not the Belief of the Goſpel, which is not half ſo uncertain or inevident as this? We need no ſuch firm ground to build our Faith upon in matters of the World, and therefore we are utterly inexcuſable, if we do not believe in the Son of God, who hath brought Life and Immortality to light.

FINIS.